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ON THE WAY TO IOWA

AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED AT IOWA CITY IOWA
BEFORE THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
ON MAY THE TWENTY-FIFTH
NINETEEN HUNDRED TEN

BY

LAENAS GIFFORD WELD

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
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ON THE WAY TO IOWA

I feel honored in being invited to give the address at this opening meeting of The State Historical Society of Iowa — a meeting in some sense complimentary to our visitors. We extend greetings to the members of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and congratulate them upon the success which has attended their organization from the beginning. This immediate success of the Association gives abundant evidence of the enterprise and sagacity of its promoters, among whose names we are proud to note that of our own Professor Shambaugh. But, as with wise men in general, they have bent their efforts along the line of opportunity; for American history is today being largely written, and is being writ large, here in the Mississippi Valley. We may say indeed, not boastfully but in truth, that world history is making here — not the history of battles and of dynasties, but of industry and public policy and finance and education — of all that makes for the uplift, the

generation and the regeneration of the world's people.

The field within which this Association is to exercise its activities is, from the standpoint of physical geography, the most remarkable on the face of the earth. Stretching from the Alleghanies on the east fifteen hundred miles to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains on the west and from the Gulf of Mexico four thousand miles northward to the Arctic Ocean, it presents a vast plain, unbroken by high mountain ranges, unmarred by desert wastes, but diversified in its climate and its products, fertile beyond comparison, abounding in mineral wealth, watered by countless streams, and comprising the most magnificent system of fresh water seas in the world. Toward this region the tide of world empire has been setting for three quarters of a century and is not even yet at its height. The financier may turn his eyes toward Wall Street or Threadneedle Street, the student may plan his pilgrimage to Cambridge or Leipzig, the artist may long for the inspiration afforded by the Louvre or the galleries of Florence, but the teeming millions of the over-crowded places of the world, with hands restless to do and hearts ready to dare,

turn eager faces toward this great central basin of North America. In the centre of this vast tract, midway between the mountain barriers to the east and to the west, midway between the tropic sea to the south and the frozen sea to the north, stands Iowa. And the way thither — will it interest you for a few moments?

Ever since our school days, Columbus and De Soto have been names to conjure with. The one found the way to the new world, the other made known something of its vast extent. But the significance of De Soto's discovery of the Mississippi in 1541 was quite unheeded and his expedition was remembered only on account of its disastrous ending. So far as authentic records indicate, a century and a quarter passed by before any white man again looked upon the "father of waters". Meantime our Atlantic seaboard was dotted with English, French, and Dutch settlements—Catholic or Huguenot, Puritan or Cavalier. Meantime, too, the armed merchantmen of Europe "poked their noses", as it were, into every bay and up every navigable stream opening to the Atlantic, from Tierra del Fuego to Greenland, in search of a passage through to the Pacific, which should shorten the route to southeast-

ern Asia — to "Far Cathay". But for ten thousand miles the American Continent presented an impassable barrier. To penetrate this barrier was, indeed, the great geographical problem of the two centuries following the landfall of Columbus. Hudson ascended the river which bears his name in the hope of finding an easy portage to some tributary of the Pacific. The same quest lured Captain John Smith up the James River and Cartier up the St. Lawrence.

The crude astrolabes used by the early navigators enabled them to determine latitudes with reasonable accuracy, but the determination of longitude at sea requires some form of chronometer, and timepieces had not yet been brought to any degree of perfection. And so, even after Sir Francis Drake had sailed far up the Pacific coast of North America, there was no adequate conception of the breadth of the continent. Hence it was but natural that, hearing from the Indians of a "great water" to which the streams over on the western slopes of the Alleghanies made their way, the colonists on the Atlantic seaboard should identify this "great water" with the Pacific or South Sea and imagine that upon reaching it the way to Cathay

would be much easier than by way of the Straits of Magellan or 'round the Cape of Good Hope. The "great water" to the west was, of course, the Mississippi, but all this was for many years understood but vaguely, if at all. The real extent of the *hinterland* of the American colonies was but dimly comprehended and not at all appreciated until long after these colonies had achieved their national independence. But a far different situation prevailed among the French colonies to the north as we shall presently see.

Singularly enough the history of the Mississippi Valley began with Jacques Cartier's voyage up the St. Lawrence. Fishing fleets were now frequenting the waters about Newfoundland, occasionally ascending the river for the winter and carrying on a profitable fur trade with the Indians. It soon became evident that this trade was well worth developing. The supply seemed inexhaustible and furs soon came to be sought by the French in the north as eagerly if not as rapaciously as was gold by the Spaniards in the south. Champlain came up the river, bringing colonists who founded Quebec, in the same year that the English founded Jamestown. Whence came this supply of furs? And whence

came this great river, mightier ten-fold than any of the rivers of Europe? The first of these problems appealed to Champlain's superiors, the latter to Champlain himself. He took but little interest in his colony except as it served him as a base for his explorations. He heard of a great sea to the west and would reach it and find thereby the way to Far Cathay. The St. Lawrence itself was blocked by the Iroquois Indians of northern New York, whose hostility to the French, and particularly to Champlain, was fierce and unrelenting. So he pushed his canoes up the Ottawa until its waters enmeshed with those of a lake called Nipissing. From this lake he followed a river, now known as French River down to the Georgian Bay of Lake Huron. The Great Lakes lay before him, but it was not his to explore them. Indeed he had been preceded thus far by Franciscan missionaries who were already established among the Huron Indians at the head of this same bay.

Then followed two decades of confusion and reorganization of the French colonies. The great Richelieu next assumed their management and, though Champlain was reappointed governor, commerce and trade were monopolized by a com-

pany known as the Hundred Associates; while the Jesuits were virtually in charge of all other interests, temporal as well as spiritual. The Franciscan missionaries were peremptorily excluded from the country — their work, representing a quarter of a century of intense devotion, being ignored and even discredited. Forthwith began the publication of that remarkable and invaluable series of documents known as the *Jesuit Relations.* In these we find recorded from year to year, in the language of the devoted fathers themselves, the principal events and items of interest in connection with the various missions established, not only in the vicinity of the settlements along the St. Lawrence, but in the far Northwest on the remotest borders of the Great Lakes as well.

Champlain seems merely to have been in charge of the garrisons stationed at Quebec and Three Rivers, but was at the same time free to promote further explorations. This he did, though now too old to again set out upon the wilderness trail himself. He dispatched Jean Nicollet on a voyage westward through the waters of Lake Huron to obtain more definite information regarding those countries which,

through current rumors, were identified as the Asiatic Orient.

It is recorded that Nicollet took with him upon this journey, carefully sewed up in an oil-skin bag, a handsomely embroidered mandarin's cape or cloak, in order that, when he should appear at the Chinese court, he might be respectably attired. The enterprise was one for which Nicollet was well prepared. For fifteen years he had lived among various Algonquin tribes, acquiring their languages and inuring himself to the hardships of the wilderness.

The Jesuits had arranged to reëstablish the mission to the Huron Indians at the head of Georgian Bay, from which the Franciscans had been so summarily recalled. Each year the canoe fleet of the Hurons came down the Ottawa laden with furs for trade with the French on the St. Lawrence. In July of 1634 it was that the missionaries Brebeuf, Daniel, and Davost embarked with this annual canoe fleet on its return journey to the Huron country. Nicollet was one of this motley company, but the situation was far less novel to him than to his fellow countrymen of the black robes. The journey up the Ottawa was both difficult and dangerous. This was "on the

way to Iowa", so let me quote to you what the *Jesuit Relations* say of it.

"Of the ordinary difficulties", writes Brebeuf in his report (*J. R.* 1635), "the chief is that of the rapids and portages. Your reverence" (addressing Le Jeune, the superior at Quebec) "has already seen enough of the rapids at Kebec to know what they are. All the rivers of this country are full of them notably [this river. It runs not over][1] "a smooth bed, but is continually broken up, rolling and leaping in a frightful way, like an impetuous torrent: and even, in some places, it falls down suddenly from a height of several fathoms. . . . Now when these rapids or torrents are reached it is necessary to land and carry on the shoulders through woods and over high and jagged rocks all the baggage and the canoes themselves." This narrative, continued in Brebeuf's own words for the most part literally translated, affords a fair sample of the style and spirit of the *Jesuit Relations.* "In some

[1] Portions enclosed in brackets are not rendered in accordance with the original, but the meaning is in no way modified. For example, in this instance, in place of *this river* the original has *the River St. Lawrence after that of the Prairies is passed,* which does not convey a definite or even a correct impression to the reader not familiar with the names applied to these streams at the time referred to.

places where the current is . . . strong . . . the savages get into the water and haul and guide . . . their canoes with great difficulty and danger; for they sometimes get in up to the neck and are compelled to let go . . . saving themselves as best they can from the rapidity of the water which snatches the canoe from them and bears it away. This happened to one of our Frenchmen who remained alone in the canoe, all the savages having left it to the mercy of the torrent. [He was in a sorry plight but at last his life was saved] and the canoe also with all that was in it." No wonder that Nicollet had sewn up his mandarin's cloak in an oilskin bag!

"I kept count of the number of portages", continues Brebeuf, "and found that we carried our canoes thirty-five times and dragged them at least fifty: . . . Another difficulty is in regard to provisions. Frequently one has to fast, if he misses the *caches* that were made [by the savages when on their way down], and even if they are found one still has a good appetite even after indulging in them; for the ordinary food is only a little Indian corn coarsely broken between stones and sometimes taken whole in pure water. It is no great treat. . . . Add to these difficulties

that one must sleep on the bare earth, or even on the hard rock, . . . and must walk in the water or mud and in the frightful entanglement of the forest, where the stings of an infinite number of mosquitos and gnats are a [continual torment]. . . . But . . . we all had to begin by these experiences to bear the cross that our Lord presents to us for his honor and for the salvation of these poor barbarians. In truth I was sometimes so weary that the body could do no more, but at the same time my soul experienced very deep peace, considering that I was suffering for God. No one knows it if he has not experienced it".

It was under such difficulties as these that Nicollet's journey was begun; but Brebeuf speaks admiringly of him as being "equal to all the hardships endured by the most robust savages." But their tiresome ascent of the Ottawa was finally accomplished and the canoes glided out upon the waters of Lake Nipissing; then down French River to Georgian Bay and on to its head, where the Jesuits immediately established themselves in the place formerly occupied by the Franciscans. They were soon joined by Nicollet, who had tarried for a time with the Indians on an island in the Ottawa (*Isle des Allumettes*).

After procuring a suitable outfit and engaging seven Hurons to act as guides, Nicollet bade adieu to Father Brebeuf and his associates and set out on his voyage westward. His commission required him to explore such countries as he might be able to reach and to make commercial treaties with the people dwelling therein. The party coasted along the eastern and northern shores of Lake Huron, passing through the dangerous channel to the north of the Manitoulins until they found themselves tossing about in the eddies below the Sault Ste. Marie in water through which now floats a commerce whose tonnage is three times that which passes Port Saïd and Suez.

But for Nicollet the scene seems to have had no special interest. He must have heard from the Indians of Lake Superior, but makes no mention of having visited it. The water coursing past his camp at the foot of the rapids was fresh and gave no promise that the "salt sea" of which he was in search lay beyond. Thus did he miss discovering the greatest of all the Great Lakes. Dropping down St. Mary's Strait he rounded the upper peninsula of Michigan and passed on through the Straits of Mackinac. The "second

lake of the Hurons," as Lake Michigan was for a time called, lay before him. Boldly following the northern shore of this new-found sea Nicollet entered Green Bay, land-locked by the present State of Wisconsin. He pushed on to its head, where he for the first time encountered tribes of Indians with whom he could not converse. He believed himself upon the outskirts of the vast Chinese empire. Being invited to a council with the chiefs he donned his mandarin's cloak and approached, discharging his pistols into the air. The impression was all that could be desired, but he soon discovered that he had not yet reached China nor even its outskirts. He was well received, however, and passed on up the Fox River.

After traversing Lake Winnebago he found himself once more among Indians of the Algonquin stock whose language was quite intelligible. From them he heard of a "great water" which could be reached in three days by a short portage from the Upper Fox River. The portage referred to was, of course, that into the Wisconsin River at what is now Portage City. Had he taken this "three days' journey" he would have debouched, not upon a new sea as he supposed, but

upon the upper course of the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien opposite McGregor, in Clayton County, Iowa. The "way to Iowa" had been pointed out, but was not to be followed up until forty years later. Why Nicollet missed this opportunity, as he had already missed that at Lake Superior, is not in the least clear. What he did do was to travel overland to the south to visit and establish friendly relations with the great nation of Illinois Indians, obtaining at the same time some general notion of the extent of Lake Michigan. He was at Three Rivers (on the St. Lawrence) again in July, 1635. How the "great water" of which he had heard was regarded by his contemporaries is evident from this passage quoted from the Jesuit Relation of Vimont for the year 1640. "Sieur Nicollet, who has advanced farthest into these distant countries has assured me that had he gone three days' journey farther from a river which issues from this lake" (the second lake of the Hurons, or Lake Michigan) "he would have found the sea. Now I have strong suspicions" [that through this sea there would be a passage toward Japan and China].

But the discoveries of Nicollet were not soon to

be followed up. Scarcely had he returned when Champlain died. Then came a succession of incompetent governors. The Iroquois took advantage of the situation and devastated the country, utterly destroying the Huron nation (1649). Such of the Jesuit missionaries as had escaped death were hastily recalled. The fugitive Hurons and Ottawas betook themselves to the remotest shores of the Great Lakes or sought refuge at Quebec, while others became amalgamated with the Iroquois themselves. Even the fortified settlements on the St. Lawrence were in danger. Trade was, of course, completely demoralized. Many of the wood-rangers (*Coureurs de bois*), cut off from the settlements, found their only safety in plunging deeper into the great interior wilderness.

As soon as some degree of order had been restored explorations were pushed farther than ever to the northwest for the purpose of reëstablishing the fur trade, which had almost entirely fallen away with the destruction of the Huron and Ottawa nations. In 1660 Radisson and his brother-in-law, Grosseilliers, launched their canoes upon Lake Superior and followed the south shore to the end of the lake. Here they lo-

cated the remnants of the Huron and Ottawa tribes, secure in these distant regions from the fury of the Iroquois. It is claimed that the brothers, in their overland explorations, came upon the Mississippi; but, while it may be reasonably inferred, this is not definitely confirmed by Radisson's journal.

However, one thing in this journal is of special interest to us as Iowans. At the close of the narrative of his explorations, Radisson gives a list of the various Indian tribes of which he had knowledge and many of whom he had personally visited. Among these we find mentioned the *Maingonis.* These were probably the *Moingonas,* who at this period dwelt along the Illinois River, though they were found in Iowa not many years later. Our capital city is named from the river Des Moines, i. e. *La riviere des Moingonas.* I believe this to be the earliest appearance of the name in history.

Among other missions soon established in the far northwest was one at La Pointe, near Bayfield, on Lake Superior, in northern Wisconsin, near the trading station occupied eight or nine years before by Radisson. This was the direct successor of the old Huron mission at the head

of Georgian Bay; for, as just explained, it was to this region that the Hurons and Ottawas had fled in their terror of the Iroquois. Here was stationed Father Jacques Marquette, a young man of about thirty years and one of the most picturesque characters among the Jesuits in North America.

Indians from far and near resorted to these mission stations to meet the French fur traders on their yearly visits. Marquette, at La Pointe, heard repeatedly from members of the Illinois tribes of the "great river" by which they came thither to trade — the same "great river", he had no doubt, which was believed by some geographers to flow into the Vermilion Sea (Gulf of California), by others into the Gulf of Mexico. He would explore it; but, before the opportunity presented itself, the Sioux Indians, the "Iroquois of the West", became openly hostile and the dispirited Hurons and Ottawas fled again — the Hurons to *Machillimackinac* (Mackinac) and the Ottawas to the Manitoulin Islands. Marquette went with the Hurons and established his new mission at St. Ignace, at the head of Lake Michigan, on the main land of the northern peninsula of Michigan just opposite Mackinac Is-

land. At about the same time another important missionary and trading station was established at the head of Green Bay, in Wisconsin.

Talon, the capable *intendent* of New France, was now devoting his best energies to establishing the claim of the mother country to that region in the west, the real extent of which was beginning to unfold itself with the simultaneous advance of missionary and fur trader. He meant to occupy this region and secure control of its great water-ways. Little recked he of Far Cathay. He dreamed of a vast new empire for France. The English, mere grubbers of the soil, were to be confined to the region between the Atlantic coast and the Alleghanies, while Spanish influence was to be thwarted by the establishment of French colonies on the Gulf of Mexico.

A splendid expedition was organized under Saint Lusson, acting as lieutenant, and sent to Sault Ste. Marie to take formal possession of the whole interior of North America in the name of the French King, Louis XIV. But Talon was determined to give the claim made in behalf of his sovereign a more substantial foundation. He resolved to discover and map the course of that mysterious "great river" concerning which such

conflicting but insistent rumors had been current ever since the days of Champlain. To execute his purpose he chose Louis Jolliet.

At this juncture, however, Talon disagreed with the governor and both were recalled. The new governor, Comte de Frontenac, at once adopted the ideas of Talon and proceeded to their execution. Jolliet was confirmed in his appointment.

The way to Mackinac, to which place Jolliet now journeyed, was not new to him. He was already a path-finder, having only recently demonstrated the continuity of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie with the other lakes of the system. At Mackinac he was joined by Father Marquette, still in charge of the Huron mission at St. Ignace. It was early spring. The ice had just left the straits. They made instant haste to prepare for the journey. Five companions were chosen — all Frenchmen and experienced wood-rangers. Their two canoes were selected with unusual care. They were of birch bark, stiffened with cedar splints. Though large enough to carry safely the seven *voyageurs* and their provisions of smoked meat and maize, besides blankets, camp utensils, guns, instruments, and a quantity

of trinkets to serve as presents to the Indians, they were still light enough to be easily portable. Jolliet and the five wood-rangers were dressed in the buckskin suits then worn by frontiersmen; but Marquette retained his long black Jesuit's cassock and cumbered himself with no weapon save his rosary.

On the seventeenth of May, 1673, they pushed off their canoes into the crescent-shaped bay at St. Ignace, rounded the point to the south, and headed westward along the northern shore of Lake Michigan. The *voyageurs* must have felt the quickening influence of the changing season. They paddled all day, relieving one another by turns. Trolling lines were set to catch fish. At twilight they landed to prepare for the night. The sand of the beach still retained the heat of the midday sun. Each canoe was hauled up beyond the reach of the waves, turned over and propped up by one edge to serve as shelter. One of the party collected dry drift wood for the fire. Another cut forked sticks and set them up in the sand to hold a cross bar upon which the kettle was hung. Hulled corn was cooked; the fish were broiled in the embers; and Marquette blessed the simple meal. Then, sitting 'round

the camp fire, the tired explorers smoked their pipes and rested. Such was the routine of their voyage on Lake Michigan.

Pushing on day after day, along the route followed by Nicollet thirty-nine years before, the party soon entered the Baie des Puans, later known as Grande Baye, now Green Bay. They turned into the Menominee River and visited the village of the Indian tribe of the same name, which name signifies *wild rice*. Here they heard dreadful tales of the country and the river which they were about to visit and were urged to go no farther. A few days later they were welcomed at the mission at the head of the bay, still conducted, as it had been founded, by Father Claude Allouez. After making some final arrangements here they ascended Fox River, crossed Lake Winnebago, and entered the devious upper course of the same stream. On the seventh of June they had reached the neighborhood of the portage to the Wisconsin River, first made known by Nicollet.

Guides were secured to conduct them to the point at which the portage was easiest. This point reached, they carried their canoes and baggage a mile and a half over a marshy prairie

and, parting with their guides, launched upon the *Mesconsing* (Wisconsin), whose current might bear them to the South Sea, the Gulf of California or the Gulf of Mexico, they knew not which.

The navigation of the Wisconsin presented no serious difficulties and ten days later, on the seventeenth of June, the explorers floated out upon the broad surface of a mighty river, which they must have recognized at once as the "great water" which they had been sent to find out and explore. They were in the shadow of the almost mountainous bluff at the foot of which lies the quaint little town of South McGregor, the Bingen of the Mississippi. Beyond lay the rolling prairies of Iowa; but little did they, or their successors for a century and a half to come, dream of such a commonwealth as ours. The depth and breadth of the channel and the swiftness of the current gave them some notion of the extent of the territory to which they had gained access.

The canoes were turned down stream and, as they floated on, the *voyageurs* justly marvelled at the grandeur of the prospect, which developed new features at every turn of the great river. For days the easy voyage along the eastern bor-

der of Iowa was continued without meeting the slightest trace of human habitation. Late each afternoon they landed to stretch their cramped limbs and do their simple cooking; then carefully extinguishing the fire they floated some miles farther on and anchored after dark at a distance from the shore, leaving one of the party on guard while the others slept. At sunrise they were under way again. Once those in Marquette's canoe were frightened by a huge catfish that threatened to damage their frail craft. The great sturgeon that "rushed through the water like hungry sharks" also excited their wonder and apprehension. Buffalo and deer came down to the water's edge and wild turkeys were often seen. Such was the routine of their voyage upon the Mississippi.

Not a canoe, not a hut or a landing place, not a sign of human habitation was seen until the twenty-fifth of June, when they discovered human footprints at the water's edge on the west bank. Leaving their companions to guard the canoes, the two leaders landed, quite unarmed. A trail was found conducting up the bank and into the interior. They followed it for five or six miles over a fine rolling prairie to a village,

or rather a group of three villages, situated near a considerable stream. Their reception was ceremonious but cordial. The Indians were of the Illinois nation and had crossed the Mississippi to escape the prowling bands of Iroquois whose devastating raids were feared even as far west as this. The villages were called Peouaria, after the tribe which occupied them. Another village called Moingouena is also set down upon Marquette's map at some distance, though he makes no mention of it in his narrative. The first of these names survives as Peoria, the now populous district of which this city is the centre, being the proper country of the Illinois tribes. The second name, Moingouena, has, as we have already explained, been corrupted into Des Moines and applied to the stream supposed to be the one upon whose banks the villages visited by Marquette were located. Careful study of his map and a comparison of latitudes, however, indicate beyond reasonable doubt that the site in question was near the mouth of our own Iowa (or Cedar) River. Such being the case, the town of Wapello, in Louisa County, cannot be far from the point at which was held this first conference on Iowa soil, if not in the Mississippi Valley, be-

tween the white man and the Indian. It is fitting, therefore, that this Association should hold one of its earlier meetings here at the legal and historical "head of navigation" of this, the Iowa, river.

The Indians begged the Frenchmen to remain with them, assuring them that the sun had never shone so brightly nor their tobacco had so rich a flavor as since their arrival. An elaborate banquet was served, the four courses being in order hulled corn, fish, dog, and buffalo marrow bones. (And, gentlemen, you will enjoy an equal hospitality in Iowa to-day). Presents were exchanged. The calumet was smoked with due formalities and given to Marquette as a peace token to be displayed as occasion might require.

So hospitable was their entertainment that it was the end of June before the explorers felt that they could with propriety return to their canoes and resume their voyage. Some days later they passed the mouth of the Illinois, then that of the Missouri. This last stream must have been at high water for it is described as a "torrent of yellow mud sweeping in its course logs, branches and uprooted trees." They seem to have been duly impressed by the vastness of

a continent that could send forth two such mighty rivers. The mouth of the Ohio was next passed and still they allowed themselves to be borne along by the swift current day after day. However, the Indians became less friendly. Strange tribes were encountered with whom not even Marquette could converse. They were regarded with suspicion and, at times, were even in peril; but the peace calumet never failed to secure them safe passage in the end. The long voyage back, against the current of the river, was becoming a matter for serious consideration. Finally, at the mouth of the Arkansas River they determined to turn back. They rightly regarded the problem of the Mississippi as solved. To go on would avail them nothing and might, they thought, lead to their capture by Spaniards and the consequent sacrifice of the results of their expedition.

On the seventeenth of July, just two months after leaving St. Ignace and one month after the discovery of the river, they began the tedious journey home. Week in and week out they toiled on, the midsummer sun beating fiercely upon their backs as they plied the paddles. Marquette was seized with a painful illness from which he

never wholly recovered. Upon reaching the mouth of the Illinois River they were assured that the easiest route to Mackinac lay up this river and by portage into Lake Michigan (*Lac des Illinois*). Their toilsome journey now became, relatively, a triumphal pageant under the escort of the friendly Kaskaskias, a tribe of the great Illinois nation.

The route took them up the Des Plaines River, past an isolated bluff which traders later named *Mont Jolliet* and which marks the site of the modern town of Joliet. Forty miles farther on they made the Chicago portage. Even then Jolliet noted the strategic importance of this portage and later indicated, in his report to Frontenac, the ease with which the Mississippi Valley could be opened to commerce by means of a canal connecting the Chicago and the Des Plaines rivers. Bidding adieu to their escort they once more launched their canoes upon Lake Michigan and made their way along its western shore to the post at the head of Green Bay. Here they were again in touch with civilization — such as the New World then afforded.

The way to Iowa — to the whole Middle West, as well — had been discovered. But between this

discovery of Iowa and the beginning of its proper history there is an interval of a century or more. During this interval the region was frequently and even continuously visited by white men. Its broad prairies, the Mesopotamia of the New World, were doubtless well known to the French and American traders who by turns coursed up and down the Mississippi and the Missouri in quest of buffalo skins.

But the men who have made Iowa and our Middle West what it is to-day came, not by way of the Great Lakes from Canada, nor up stream from the French colonies of Louisiana; not in canoes laden with baubles such as cheat the savage, but in emigrant wagons with wives and children and bringing implements of agriculture. They came swarming through the passes of the Alleghanies and brought with them into this new land the spirit of the American Revolution — the spirit of the free state founded upon the Christian home.

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